

BOROONDARA

Bicycle Users Group

Boroondara Bicycle Users Group
Submission Regarding

City of Boroondara
Draft Open Space Strategy

13 February 2012

All feedback on the Strategy must be sent to Council by 29th February 2012

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Introduction

BBUG thanks Council for providing us with the opportunity to provide input into the strategy. BBUG may make this submission available on its website.

Executive Summary

In a densely populated, inner-urban environment such as Boroondara has now become, open space is an extremely precious resource. There are many competing demands by users of open space in Boroondara as in other municipalities. One very important use of open space is for linkages and corridors for use by both cyclists and walkers. These linkages and corridors include those that extend beyond the boundaries of Boroondara. Any development of Boroondara's open spaces must take due account of both existing and possible future shared paths passing through or around them. No development should occur that blocks or downgrades through routes for cyclists and walkers.

Introduction

While we appreciate that Council must consider the needs of various groups in planning the use of open space, the main focus of the BBUG submission is the potential for linear paths to provide through routes for both utility and recreational cyclists and walkers.

We strongly believe that no existing open space should be sold, or otherwise alienated from public use, without the most thorough investigation of its potential future use for the public benefit, and in particular of its potential to form part of a link that could be used by cyclists or walkers. There are far too many examples around Melbourne of corridors for linear paths being blocked by private land ownership, and of lost opportunities for linkages. In addition, every effort should be made to take up any opportunities that arise for adding to existing open space, particularly if this facilitates the creation of new linkages between existing linear paths or parks.

Just as some of Boroondara's larger parks are identified as having regional significance, so the corridors through which the linear paths pass serve a public well beyond the boundaries of Boroondara. Just as Boroondara residents make use of such paths in other municipalities, so people from all over Melbourne and beyond enjoy using Boroondara's off-road shared paths.

The use by walkers and cyclists of the shared paths which pass through linear parks and other larger parks is a completely legitimate use of open space, in no way inferior to, or less genuine than, their use for either organized sporting events on the one hand, or passive recreation on the other. We reject the view that parks are somehow being hijacked for an alien purpose by those who simply pass through. Most recreational cyclists and walkers choose their routes carefully in order to enjoy as much parkland as possible as they ride or walk. Many commuter cyclists choose to ride on shared paths rather than the roads, even when they are less direct, in order to enjoy the more pleasant environment they offer. For these people the journey is at least as important as the destination.

Proposed Hawthorn to Box Hill Trail

A high priority identified in Boroondara's Bicycle Strategy is the provision of an east-west cycle link through the centre of Boroondara. The precise route for this link is still to be determined, however there is a high likelihood that it will pass through a number of Boroondara's parks. For example Grace Park currently has a path running through it that could form part of the link. Additional parks that may form part of the link include Central Gardens and Fritz Holzer Park. Any developments proposed for these parks should take account of this possibility.

Other Strategic Links

Several other parks are strategically positioned to provide important connections in the metropolitan shared path network. The most obvious example is the longstanding proposal to connect the Darebin Creek Trail to the Main Yarra Trail via Willsmere Park.

Another very important link is that in the Gardiners Creek Path between Solway Bridge and Warrigal Rd. A shared path has now been constructed linking the Anniversary Trail to Warrigal Rd via Markham Avenue and Markham Reserve, however the need remains for a more direct link closer to Gardiners Creek. Developments, including planting, in this park should be planned with a view to the possible construction of this link at a later date.

Hays Paddock is another park which occupies a very strategic position in relation to existing paths, as well as a possible future path along the southern side of the Eastern Freeway. Any developments in Hays Paddock should take account of this.

Possible Extension of the Shared Path along the Old Kew Rail Line

There is currently a shared path from Grace Park to Hawthorn Grove along the route of the old Kew rail line, through linear parkland including the LE Bray Reserve. This path, though currently somewhat underdeveloped, connects at Grace Park with what will probably eventually become the Hawthorn – Box Hill Trail, running east-west through the centre of Boroondara.

The California Inn site that runs between Hawthorn Grove and Barkers Road is currently awaiting re-development, and VicRoads has plans to relocate operations from its site in Denmark St, Hawthorn. This fortunate coincidence opens up the possibility of acquiring a corridor of land to extend the existing path almost to Kew Junction. This would provide a valuable link for local walkers and cyclists, and would provide an alternative to cycling along a stretch of Glenferrie Rd where there is very little room for manoeuvre, or Power and Denmark Sts which are also very bike unfriendly. The old railway easement with its gentle gradient makes for a route that is particularly suitable for cyclists.

We urge Council to give high priority to this land acquisition as once lost the opportunity may never be available again.

Toilets, Drinking Water and Picnic Facilities on Trails

Another issue that concerns us is that of access to toilets along shared paths. The obvious place for such toilets is in the parks through which the trails pass, where they are available to both trail and park users. If they are not easily sighted from the shared path signage is needed. It is important that toilets are open for use by cyclists and pedestrians at all times they are likely to be using the paths. Facilities in sports grounds often fail to meet this requirement.

A single Exeloo is no substitute for multiple toilets. Both walking and cycling groups use shared paths, and this is a growing trend as more Baby Boomers retire and work to maintain their fitness. These groups plan toilet stops at regular intervals for their mainly mature-age members. For a group of up to 20 walkers or cyclists a single toilet is quite inadequate.

It is also highly desirable that taps designed to enable refilling of water bottles are included with all toilet facilities on shared paths. Taps over hand-basins and drinking fountains do not always meet this need.

Groups of cyclists and walkers using the paths often build refreshment stops into their plans. Picnic shelters with tables and seating are highly desirable for these groups, given that the majority are dominated by mature-age people, and that they tend to persevere with their activities even in inclement weather. The ideal location for such facilities is close, but not too close, to toilets and drinking water.

The new playground at Markham Reserve in Ashburton is in many respects an example of just what is needed. Here, right next to the Gardiners Creek link trail, is a playground incorporating a toilet, drinking fountains, and picnic shelters with tables. The main problem is that due to its popularity with young families walkers and cyclists may find they have stiff competition for the facilities! In particular the single Exeloo may well prove inadequate for the demands placed on it.

Bike Parking Facilities

Cycling as a mode of access to local sporting and recreational facilities needs every encouragement. Apart from providing safe routes to access parks that include such facilities it is important that adequate numbers of bike parking rails are provided. The siting of such parking rails needs careful thought. They need to be in a location that is close to the facilities, and as secure as possible, which generally means that they need to be highly visible. Ideally they should be under cover so cyclists are not exposed to rain or hot sun while locking up and unlocking them, and bike seats do not get wet or overheated.

Dogs and Cyclists

It is inevitable that many open spaces must be shared by cyclists and dog walkers. In some cases shared paths run through dogs off-lead parks. This creates the potential for serious accidents. Both cyclists and dog walkers have a responsibility to take measures to avoid such accidents. Cyclists need to slow down and be alert, and dog walkers need to control their pets on and near paths and keep them well clear of paths while off-lead. Signage in parks should make this joint responsibility clear rather than putting all responsibility on one group, the cyclists, as has occurred at times. All rate payers need to be made aware that dog owners are liable for damage, both personal and property, caused by their dog.

Pedestrian-Cyclist Conflict on Shared Paths

There is widespread concern about pedestrian-cyclist conflict on shared paths. It is important to keep a sense of proportion about the actual danger to pedestrians involved here. More people have probably been killed or injured by dogs than by cyclists. And cyclists have just as much to fear from a collision as any pedestrian they hit.

Possible measures to make shared paths safer for all users include the following. All shared paths need to be brought up to a minimum width of 3m, with very busy sections made even wider, where possible. Segregated paths can be constructed on strategic routes carrying commuter and high volume traffic where space permits. Also of assistance are centre-line marking, stenciling of paths to highlight their shared status, and stop lines at intersections to indicate path priority. These things encourage all path users to keep left, and to check before moving right or crossing paths. Signs encouraging cyclists to use their bells and/or voices to warn pedestrians of their presence may also help. Eradication of unnecessary bends in paths, and regular trimming of vegetation to improve and preserve sightlines are of key importance.

Victorian Government Responsibility for Shared Paths

We note that the Draft Strategy makes a number of references to Parks Victoria as the State Government agency responsible for shared paths, and to their planning document *Linking People and Spaces*, 2002. It is our understanding that responsibility for the shared trail network has been removed from Parks Victoria and now rests with the Department for Sustainability and Environment. It is also our understanding that the Victorian Government is currently reviewing its policy on the trails, and it is unclear what the status of the document *Linking People and Spaces* now is.

Julia Blunden, on behalf of the Boroondara Bicycle Users Group